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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a study that investigated factors constraining or encouraging the use of evaluation data by school administrators. It begins with a lengthy analogy about the use of a restaurant guide that is intended to illuminate how constraining or encouraging factors influence the use of evaluation data. The author defines a constraint as something a typical administrator would consider a limitation on understanding or alternative courses of action. The paper then explains and illustrates two major constraints to the utilization of evaluation results. The first is "proximity," which the author defines as similarity in time or structure. Within the author's framework, "structural proximity" of evaluation data is the similarity of the data in structure to the needs of the educators or the material being evaluated. "Temporal proximity" means the timeliness or currency of the data. The author concludes that both kinds of proximity have a positive influence on data collection. The second constraint identified is competing demands on administrators' time. According to the author, administrators are unable to pay attention to evaluation data when there are too many other demands on their time.
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TWO CONSTRAINTS TO UTILIZATION AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL*

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Introduction

A number of interesting utilization-related patterns emerged from this study's data. Perhaps the clearest of these was the differential impact of particular types of evaluation data. For example, respondents frequently noted that criterion-referenced tests had greater instructional relevance impact than norm-referenced tests and consequently their results were used to a greater extent. Similarly, the external, unfamiliar nature of a team review process was repeatedly blamed for its short-lived effect -- two weeks after it had occurred the recommendations were already being ignored.

Closer investigation of these seemingly contradictory responses to evaluation data revealed a more complex pattern. Why is it that in some instances a constellation of evaluation factors promoted attention to evaluation while in others no impact occurred? It seemed that a set of factors was present in our data that had either inhibited the attention paid to evaluation or enhanced its use by decision makers. This paper investigates these phenomena. Based on the reports of principals, coordinators, and resource teachers, we found identifiable features in the school environment, the nature

of evaluation activities and in the interaction between elements in the evaluation process that constrained or encouraged the use of evaluation information in site-level decision making.

Three broad constellations of factors emerged from the data. The first consisted of a small set of features that can be clustered under the heading of "proximity" -- the "closeness" of the evaluation data to the information already in use in the school. The second feature was a concern about competing demands on the time available to school personnel for using evaluation data. The third was a complex interaction of a number of psychosocial variables that manifested itself strongly in the affective realm -- people's attitudes and feelings toward evaluation. This paper reports on the first two of these features. Future reports will describe our findings concerning the psychosocial variables.

This paper will proceed in three stages. First, we will present an analogy to be used throughout the analysis to help illuminate the influence of the constraining and encouraging factors that emerged from the data. Second, we will define the terms "constraint" and "encourager" as they have begun to emerge in our study. Finally, our analysis of proximity concerns and competing demands on time will be presented along with some concluding remarks.

An Evaluation Analogy

Let us consider the decision making process related to a very simple and personal event -- deciding what to do about dinner. It is 8:00 P.M., Ruth Willis, principal of the El Martes School, just arrived home and is facing the dilemma of how to meet her hunger needs. There are many actions Ruth might take. She can go to the kitchen and cook dinner from what's available in the refrigerator. She might go to the store and buy a particular item that appeals to her and prepare it at home. She might go out to a restaurant and pay to have someone else do the preparations and clean up. There are probably other options as well, but let us say that these are the only three alternatives that seem reasonable to Ruth.

Earlier, the district principal's meeting lasted until 6:30 P.M. As a result, Ruth is extremely tired. She doesn't feel like cooking. Even going out and buying her favorite fixings seems like too much work. Instead, she decides to go to a restaurant.

Ruth recently received a restaurant guide as a present. It is entitled: Best Restaurants of the City from $3.50 to $50 per Person, and is a rather thorough evaluation of possible places to dine. The questions of concern to us are: How does Ruth use this information? How do the other principals who also arrived home at 8:00 P.M., not wanting to cook, use the information in their copies of the popular restaurant guide in deciding where to eat? What characteristics of the information are important in determining its usefulness to Ruth and her colleagues? Are there certain features of the situation that make all the principals behave in a similar manner? What contextual factors are the most influential in promoting or inhibiting the use of the guide?

Consider what might happen. First, Ruth checks her purse and discovers that she has only $10. This immediately eliminates a number of choices -- the $50 per person citations in the book are not going to do her too much good. As an energy conscious person, she doesn't want to drive more than five or ten miles. Besides, it's now close to 8:30 P.M., so she'll have to find a place that serves late.

As you can see, before she's even picked up the restaurant guide (looked at the evaluation) a number of factors limit her possible actions and the use she can make of the available information. Resources are an obvious concern which effect her actions and her use of the information. Her attitude toward driving long distances limits her choices, as does the time constraint imposed by her particular situation. At 6:00 P.M. the restaurant guide might be much more useful than it is

at 8:30 P.M. Information about "The Early Supper Club" is totally useless to Ruth at this point in time.

Both limited resources and lack of timely access to the data are factors that have been identified in the research as influences on evaluation utilization. Alkin, Daillak and White (1979) noted the impact of fiscal constraints and identified this as a property within their framework. Timeliness has been identified by many writers as being an important variable in utilization (Alkin, 1975; Cohen, 1977; Mitchell, 1973).[1]

There are other constraining factors to be found in this example; two will suffice for illustration. Ruth's attitudes toward travel is constraining; she doesn't like to drive far, and this limits how she might use the recommandations to be found in the book. Similarly, if she disliked Italian food, a whole section of the book might be of no interest.

The first two features we identified -- the level of available resourses and the restrictions imposed by the clock -- probably affect all the principals in the district in a similar manner.[2] On the other hand, Ruth's feelings about driving and about Italian food are clearly her own. Other

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[1]Later in this paper, we will distinguish between two different aspects of timeliness: 1) the passage of time delimiting courses of action; and, 2) evaluation information not available at the time that a definite decision must be made (this would be the case if Ruth's friend gave her the guide next week instead of last week.).

[2]One must of course allow for individual differences; it is possible that one of the principals is independently wealthy and is more of a "night person" than most of his or her colleagues.

principals are less likely to share these opinions. As a consequence they might have more options open to them and might find the information in the book more useful.

This contrast highlights an important aspect of our analysis:

1) Personal variables enter into almost every decision;

2) There may be no such things as universal encouragers or constraints. As a consequence, our labelling within these categories will be based on widely prevalent reports of factors that inhibited or facilitated utilization, not unanimous opinions.

Let us now examine some of the guide's features which tended to encourage its use in Ruth's decision. First, the guide has three different cross referenced indices. Restaurants are listed by geographic area, by type of food and by price. Thus, when Ruth opens it, restaurants are readily identified which fit her requirements -- an inexpensive, local place to eat. Secondly, in addition to its lengthy descriptions of each establishment the guide also has a very simple abbreviated rating system. A quick glance at the top of each page provides an instant summary of "quality of food" and "quality of service." Also, the book is quite extensive, providing information on a large number of choices. Finally, we musn't forget another fact which may encourage Ruth to pick up the guide and use it in making her choice...hunger. Her subconscious needs assessment tells her that food is her number one priority for the next hour or two.

Lest the analogy be unbalanced, we should also point out that the features just mentioned do not all act as encouragers to every principal. Hunger, for example, causes some of Ruth's colleagues to ignore the guide completely; reviewing all that data is simply too time consuming. Others find the book's bulk overwhelming; it offers too many choices. Long before systematically reviewing all their alternatives, they throw it down on the coffee table and head for a familiar "dive." Thus, for some people, hunger acted as a constraint while for others it was an encourager to the book's use. Likewise, the shear bulk of the book served to constrain only some of the principals.

Research has addressed some of these factors. The impact of reporting format and complexity have been examined by Alkin et al. (1974) and Glaser and Taylor (1975). On the other hand, the perceived need for an immediate decision has not been subject to a great deal of research scrutiny.

Let us continue with our story -- what about Ruth? She's reviewed the guide with some care and made her choice. At 9:00 P.M. she finds herself, along with many of her colleagues, sitting at an all night delicatessen waiting for the surly waitress to take her order. In this case, most of the principals came to the same decision. Similar constraints and evaluation information lead them to take the same course of action.

But wait, a few of Ruth's fellow principals are missing. What happened? One principal is eating a $50 steak and lobster combination -- he found the resources or maybe he used a credit

card. Another principal is at his local hamburger stand. He recognized a limitation of the evaluation -- it didn't include any restaurants less expensive than $3.50 per person. One principal was reminded by something in the guide of a new restaurant that just opened around the corner from his house, and he went there for dinner. Another noticed that the book was a year old, so he looked for supplemental references in the yellow pages. He discovered a new local restaurant. Finally, one principal said, "Its too damn late to go out, and I'm too tired." He went to bed without dinner. (Illustrating that even needs assessments have limitations.)

This analogy highlights the multiple decisions that might be arrived at based on the same evaluative data. Also illustrated are some of the factors which influence individual patterns of thought and action. As we proceed through the analysis of the data from this study we will refer to the circumstances presented in this example. The analogy will help illuminate some of the distinctions that emerged in our investigations.

Constraints and Encouragers Defined

Ruth Willis' dilemma provided a good opportunity to introduce the concept of constraints and encouragers to the utilization of evaluation. A number of interesting features in her situation affected the likelihood that the available information in the restaurant guide would impinge on her dinner decision (e.g. available resources, time, clarity of

data). And to some extent, different patterns of use existed between the principals.

Our study produced similar findings. While all the schools in the study had access to very similar evaluation data, different patterns of use emerged. Yet within these differences certain contextual features came up repeatedly in our conversations as important in determining decision makers' reaction to and use of information available to them. The notion of constraints and encouragers was borne of these similarities.

We will refer to something as a constraint if a typical administrator would find this feature a limitation on his or her understanding of a situation or his or her alternative courses of action.[3]

Not all persons would necessarily act in the same manner given the same circumstances. What one person perceives as an insurmountable obstacle to some course of action might be perceived by another person as merely an inconvenient nuisance. This points up the fact that the notions of constraint and encourager are relative, not absolute. Thus, our use of the terms "constraint" and "encourager" in this report is normative.

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[3]The question may be raised why we bother to specify both terms (constraint, encourager) when they are apparently opposites, and a single definition might suffice. There are two reasons. The first is data based -- they were viewed as distinct entities by our interviewees. Administrators themselves saw certain features as limiting and others as enhancing. It seemed worthwhile to maintain this distinction in our analysis. The other advantage for creating both labels is that certain situations are easier to describe from one point of view rather than the other. While this is purely a syntactic convenience, we decided to retain it because it was so easily accomplished.

We will only put forth as constraints or encouragers those features which represented a substantial commonality across interviewees.

A final note seems in order before describing our study results. By focusing on features that were commonly seen to be constraining or encouraging, we do not mean to underestimate the creativity or individual initiative of school administrators. The respondents in our study were a heterogeneous group, and there is probably an exception for every generalization we will offer. There were administrators in our sample for whom even the most frustrating circumstances were not allowed to act as constraints. Such especially creative individuals are probably worthy of additional study themselves. Whether you characterize them as creative, stubborn, self-centered, dynamic or as troublemakers, they were often unconstrained by factors that inhibited most of their colleagues. They are the outliers in our study, and like outliers in any data analysis, they should be investigated more carefully in the future.

Constraints and Encouragers in Practice

At this point we begin our discussion of the practical results of the study. The features we will identify as constraints and encouragers are constructs drawn from the descriptions given by the respondents in the study. They appeared as recurring patterns of events and understandings reported by many different respondents at many different schools. It is this general character that gives them practical signifi-

cance. We have selected a wide variety of quotes from our respondents to illustrate their points of view.

We begin with a discussion of the feature we have called proximity. Two types of proximity will be distinguished -- structural and temporal. Then we will discuss competing demands on time and the manner in which such demands act as a constraint to the utilization of evaluation.

Proximity

We use the word proximity as a generalization of the notion of distance -- how close or far away one thing is from another. But we use the term to mean more than just a spacial comparison. By proximity we mean the degree to which two things are similar or dissimilar along any number of different dimensions. Of particular interest in this study are the dimensions of time and structure (i.e. form, style, content, etc.). Consider the following comments offered by three respondents in our study:

> "Sometimes the district sends us evaluation forms which don't really meet what our school is doing; we try to devise our own based on what they've given us." (11SP1)

> "Well, for the teachers who really are involved in using the test scores from state and mandated tests its helpful...and we do have a couple of teachers who use that. But mostly our teachers use the tests from XXXX (the management system) the math program and from the reading program. They mainly use those to see where their children are and to replace and regroup." (13SP1)

> "It seems to me the district needs to get information to the schools more quickly on issues that affect every single classroom teacher, which means those issues affecting every single child within those classrooms." (20SP1)

In one form or another, these three respondents are all talking about the same thing, the proximity of the information to some decision. The greater the 'distance' between the

information and an action the less likely it is that the information will be considered in the decision on how to act. The more effort that is required to translate information into a useable form, retain it until an appropriate time or strip it of emotional overtones the less likely it is that these transformations will be made. In our research, data related to proximity seemed to be easily categorized into two types: Structural proximity and temporal proximity.

Structural Proximity

Structural proximity denotes the degree to which a new element matches the format, content, or style of the existing elements of a system.[4]

Respondents in our study commented frequently on the form and content of the evaluation information available to them. They reported that the configuration of the information -- whether it was directly usable for teachers' instructional decisions -- affected its utilization.

This was manifest among other ways by comments on standardized testing and the district's new criterion-referred test. A large number of interviewees attested that standardized tests were less useful than local within-school tests that were based on the school's instructional program. A second common observation was that, among the required achievement tests, the district's criterion referenced test (DCRT) had the potential

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[4]A further subdivision is possible. One could differentiate between the form of information -- i.e. its physical arrangement and its content. While evidence for such differences can be found in our data, it is a fairly technical distinction which was not generally made. For the time being we will consider only the general category of structure and not divide things further.

to be much more useful than the CTBS test.

> "We use the XXXX reading program, and (evaluate based on) the movement in terms of the number of steps children achieved during the year... The XXXX is much easier for use because there's a daily, even a weekly, evaluation... There are so many variables in a one shot test like the CTBS, so from the school's point of view the XXXX management system ... (is) much more useful to us." (13P)

> "Why are we putting up with this (standardized test) year after year, when we know there are better things we could be doing with our time? There are other intruments possibly which we could be using to give us the kinds of information we want. That's why we lean more heavily on teacher evaluations and those kind of in-house tests." (11SP2)

> "The test scores we utilize have been the ones that are criterion referenced tests like DCRT." (20SP1)

The important point illustrated by these comments does not simply pertain to testing but rather to how easily the information could be used for instructional decision making. The extent to which new information (particularly from evaluation) corresponds to the format and content of information already used by the classroom teacher dictates the degree to which it will be used in decisions.

Recall our analogy. Under the given circumstances Ruth Willis would be much less likely to review the restaurant guide before choosing a place to dine if it lacked cross-referenced indicies and if there were no easy-to-read summary ratings for each restaurant. These physical features (the <u>form</u> of the guide) made it more useful to her. Under other circumstances she might be pleased to brouse leisurely through lengthy reviews, but in her current operating procedure (rushed) she responded to a more sparce and efficient organization.

Similarly, under those hurried circumstances Ruth would be more likely to review a restaurant guide that featured only inexpensive restaurants than an encyclopedic review of all dining establishments in the area. The former (though much less complete) corresponded more closely to her specific needs. It provided the kinds of information (the content of the guide) she was ready to receive.

An example from our study would be useful here. A number of schools have adopted the XYZ management system to coordinate their arithmetic program. Students progress is monitored against the XYZ arithmetic continuum in all classrooms. The continuum includes basic arithmetic skills for grades 1 to 6. Learning tasks are proscribed according to a diagnostic test, and students progress through the skill areas one by one. Periodic testing is used to verify the students mastery of skills and assign new learning tasks.

In the fall of the year teachers at these schools receive the arithmetic test scores from the annual Title I evaluation. The CTBS test is used in this evaluation, and the teachers receive grade level equivalent scores on each student in the areas of Computation, Concepts and Applications.

It should not be surprising to learn that this information is not very useful. There are a number of reasons for this. One prominent reason is that the CTBS scores have little if any direct relation to the XYZ skill levels.

The information that the teacher receives from the evaluation based on the CTBS is different, doesn't fit into her regular pattern of assessment, doesn't have a natural correspondence to the ongoing program, etc. It is dissimilar in many respects from the existing classroom structure and each of these dissimilarities is an obstacle to its use. At least that is what respondents in our sample seem to be saying.

It should be pointed out at this point that we are not criticizing the CTBS test on technical grounds -- validity and reliability are not the current issues of concern. Rather we are simply noting that this test (and others like it) is less likely to be incorporated into teachers' planning and decision making if it differs markedly from the data the teacher is already set to process.

We can think of several factors explaining why structural proximity might enhance the utilization of evaluations. Evaluation information that has structural proximity is preferable because:

1. It is familiar and therefore more credible.
2. It requires less effort to translate into a useable form.
3. It matches other data more closely and thus fits more readily into an ongoing aggregate of evaluative data.

These three factors are affirmed by the comments of our respondents:

> "I think that it (school-level evaluation) is more positive because its at the grass roots. It's more beneficial; its more meaningful because it takes place where the action is... The initial evaluation in a school is teacher-pupil." (20SP1)

"They (the results from DCRT) are individual, and they are the skills the child needs. But they come back to us in a form that is not very useable. In order to get the material in a useable form it takes much of the teachers time, and she's just trying to survive and doesn't quite have that time." (14SP1)

"I think for the most part that the data that's being collected for on-site programs -- School Improvement, Title I -- is, for the most part, useless from one year to the next... The continuum? -- the district changes them. Title I changes their requirements. So from one year to the next, the only continuum at this school that is the same from three years ago when I was Title I Coordinator until now is the one for (the reading program)." (15SP1)

One might ask how it is possible on a broad basis to increase proximity of evaluations when each teacher has a unique structure in his or her classroom? How could one ever hope to match each of these different structural patterns? Fortunately the similiarities in curriculum, textbooks, and tests are much greater than the differences. While individual teaching styles and personalities are not standardized, curricula, textbooks, and management systems usually are. In most schools, each teacher in a grade level uses the same test. Often the whole school uses the same series. In terms of instructional patterns, books, management systems and assessment devices, similarities far outweigh differences. However, much greater differences occur from school to school within a district such as Metro (and we would warrant other districts as well.)

It is possible to consider structural proximity when developing an evaluation design. But an evaluator concerned

about utilization must make certain that the focus is on individual schools rather than some district lowest common denominator. If school level utilization is valued, then structural proximity concerns dictate unique attention to each school's specific educational program.[5]

Temporal Proximity. Concerns about time and timeliness were mentioned frequently by the decision makers in our study. Such comments are not surprising since temporal concerns have been identified as important aspects of utilization for almost as long as researchers have speculated about this issue.

We alluded to two different kinds of temporal concerns when presenting the restaurant guide analogy. The first of these, timeliness, is used to describe the correspondence between the receipt time of evaluation and the time at which administrative actions are taken. In Ruth Willis's case the information in the restaurant guide was timely because it was available at the time she wanted to use it. It was not still at her friend's house waiting to be wrapped and delivered.

The bilingual coordinator at one school emphasized the importance of timeliness when discussing annual achievement tests.

> "They aren't useful. I don't see teachers using them. ... You get them late in the year, when you've already planned your program. You know the children by then so they don't give you any new information." (19SP2)

There is little doubt from our data that proper fit between delivery of evaluation information and the action schedule affects

[5]However, there may be other overriding reasons to ignore structural proximity. For example, certain standardized tests may have general community acceptance that calls for their continued use.

utilization. What is interesting to note is that some of the clearest examples of good fit were unplanned, almost coincidental. Our description of the following incident illustrates the point very well.

> One of the schools observed (School #14) chose to use some of its special program funding to create resource teacher positions. Currently there are five such individuals, a reading resource teacher, a math resource teacher, a multi-cultural resource teacher, a bilingual resource teacher and a language arts resource teacher. Most have their own rooms or labs in which they teach small groups of students on a pull-out basis throughout the school year.
>
> As the program at the school grew in size and complexity problems developed-- the amount of time certain children spent away from their regular instructional program and lost continuity as well.
>
> Based on the concern that students were losing continuity of instruction and that their own workloads were unmanageable, the resource staff went to the principal to suggest a change. They suggested that resource teachers be assigned to do pull-outs with only certain grade levels. For example, the reading resource teacher might be assigned to the second and third grades for the first half of the year. During that time no other grade level could send students to this resource teacher. Each grade level would have at least one resource teacher assigned to it, but none would have more than two.
>
> Such a plan was agreed to in the spring before everyone left for summer vacation, but no specific assignments were made, awaiting the start of school in the fall.

Where does evaluation enter into this decision process? Well actually, evaluation enters only incidentally. Evaluation was not planned as an input to the decision making, but its impact was nonetheless clear and direct.

> Test results were sent back to the school in late summer. The principal, who works year-round, had time to review them. They indicated that the third and fourth grades were scoring particularly low in the area of mathematics. The tests did not give too much information about why this deficiency existed or what to do about it, but they did pinpoint the problem.

> In the fall the principal met with the resource teachers to make the grade level assignments. The math resource teacher was assigned to grades three and four, based on the DCRT scores received during the summer. Kindergarden and first grade reading scores were low, but there was a feeling among the group that these students were too young to be pulled out of classes in that manner, so the reading resource teacher was assigned somewhere else.

This evaluation information fit perfectly into the decision matrix that had already been established regarding resource teacher allocation. There were a limited number of possible ways to assign the resource teachers according to the scheme that had been adopted. When school started in the fall, all options were still open, and all options were equally easy to implement. Data directly relevant to the decision was being provided from an evaluative source, and it was an important factor in the decision.

This example illustrates the fact that serendipitious connecteions between evaluation and decision making do exist. It would be incorrect to suggest, however that this was a common experience. On the contrary, our research suggests that such occurrences are infrequent. More importantly, from our conversations with decision makers, we received the clear impression that neither evaluation nor program decision-making were planned to increase the chance that this fruitful intersection of events would occur.

This example also illustrates that "a decision" in fact consists of a number of actions or consecutive "mini-decisions."[6] In the case initial decisions were based on factors such as observations, perceptions, psychological believs and personality considerations. Subsequently, the presence of timely eval-

[6]This is quite compatible with the notion of "decision accretion" advanced by Weiss (1980).

uation data provided the basis for a further decision increment.

A second aspect of temporal proximity that we noted in our interview was the degree to which data are available for use within their active time frame. Some further explanation is required. Most data have a limited lifespan, and it serves little useful purpose to base decisions on them past their expiration date. For example, achievement scores only remain timely for instructional decisions for a short period; within a month or two the child has learned new skills and his or her old scores on earlier skills are much less useful to the teacher.

This second type of temporal proximity is illustrated in our analogy by Ruth Willis's using the most current edition of the restaurant guide. If one were trying to maximize the usefulness of a restaurant guide, one would make sure that the most current edition was being consulted, not an earlier printing.

The two aspects of temporal proximity are distinct. It is possible for data to arrive at the proper time for a decision to be made (temporal proximity in the first sense), but for the data itself to be no longer relevant. In this case, data about students' status at the time the test was administered may be useless because they do not reflect students' current level of performance.

The respondents in our study felt that they were burdened with out-of-date data which was of little use to them. Often they were asked to maintain and pass on data long past its useful life.

> "I'm saying that as far as an overall tool, to put a great deal of faith in, I don't think it (test data) is worthwhile. For the short run...within a two-week time limit, it's a great tool to take a look at...for the individual teacher who is working with the class.... They know who the children are...(But) the teachers are concerned about, 'Why am I passing this data on? The teacher next year really isn't that concerned with it once they start working with those students.'" (15SP1)

Thus two aspects of temporal proximity emerged from our data.[7] Timeliness refers to the degree to which data are available when decisions are being made. The notion of active time frame refers to whether data are available for use while they are still relevant.

What does this mean for evaluation? First, to increase utilization we must strive to coorinate data with decisions. This is no easy task. Major decisions about the organization of the school program, assignment of staff, grouping of students in classrooms, adoption of curriculum and instructional programs, etc. occur infrequently. They do occur according to a more or less predictable schedule and some coordination with evaluation should be possible. Minor decisions relating to individual students and instruction occur in classrooms every day. Relevant, accessable data can be quickly utilized.

This reminds us of the second issue. To increase utilization we must also strive to make data available quickly, while it is still meaningful. For instructional decisions within classrooms this is particularly important, but it shouldn't be ignored in either case.

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[7] Time can act as a constraint in another way. The pressures and demands of other activities can reduce the available time for consideration of data. However, we do not consider this as an element of temporal proximity rather we will discuss it below under the heading "Competing Demands on Time."

It is probably best to say that the evaluator who is concerned with utilization should strive to increase both types of temporal proximity.

To conclude our discussion of the first broad category of constraints, proximity, we note that respondents made the identifications we have described in this section clearly and distinctly. Little interpretation nor elaboration was required on our part. There was wide agreement on the importnace of structure and time. The conclusion we draw based on our data is that increased proximity would likely have a positive influence on utilization.

Competing Demands on Time

Under this heading, we are referring to the constraining presence of competing demands upon decision makers' time. When we asked our respondents how much attention they paid to evaluation, they reported that there were just too many other things demanding their attention to focus extensively on the results of evaluation. As one principal confessed:

> "Well, I'll be real candid with you, I get so busy I don't pay as much attention to evaluation material as I should. I get report after report ... I try to get the general gist of what the evaluation data is, but I do not spend a lot of time analyzing it, and I probably should ... I think it's probably very good data. There are just so many demands on me." (15P)

There is little doubt that the rapid pace and constant pressure of the school environment constrains administrators willingness and ability to devote large amounts of time to serious review and analysis of data. Most administrators in our sample reported being innundated by bureaucratic tasks and political pressures. There were some exceptions -- individuals who purposefully guarded their role as educational leader of the school and protected their time, allowing themselves the luxury of comtemplation and forethought. But, by and large, most of the administrators we talked to were caught up in the hectic business of running the educational facility, keeping up the regulations, being sure that the school's program was in compliance, supervising applications, attending meetings, learning about changes and modifications in rules and regulations, maintaining contact with the community, supervising discipline, and much more.

Not only did administrators feel these pressures, but staff did as well. Indeed, teachers and administrators both believe that the teacher's job is extremely demanding, and that teachers have little free time. Here is a typical description, with a suggestion for improvement.

> "I'm sure you must be aware of the fact that a teacher's day is really horrendous in terms of the demands on that teacher's time. (Teachers need free time to think) ... Industry has learned this -- I guess we have learned it, too, but the price tag makes it prohibitive. I think if we could run one pupil-free day a month, or if we could have two pupil-free afternoons a month, or if we had an opportunity to meet together and to interact and to dialogue and share ideas and concerns we would see improvement. But the time constraints are such that it's literally impossible." (13P)

How are judgments made and actions taken in the absence of time for contemplation? They are made much in the same manner as Ruth Willis might select a restaurant if it was 8:55 p.m. and she only had five minutes to choose. She wouldn't have time to look at the restaurant guide and would probably fall back on past experience and familiar patterns of actions. Under the pressure to make a quick decision, it is doubtful that she challenged any of her previous beliefs about which restaurants were good. More often than not, people act conservatively in such situations, falling back on patterns of behavior that have served them well in the past. (see Oskamp, 1977)

If the demands of the job act as a constraint to utilization of evaluation, is there something that can be done about it? Many of our respondents felt there was a solution. Without specific prompting, a number of decision makers concur with the principal just quoted. They believed quite firmly that improved use of evaluation data was possible. All that was lacking was

the opportunity to put some effort in the right direction.

Here are two further opinions on this issue:

> "(If we are going to do something with evaluation data) Days have to be set aside...if we could have a few days on the side where the teachers at least sit down and break bread together, I think we'd accomplish a lot more... I don't think there is enough time in the school day to have teachers meet and evaluate the school program. I think if we had some clear days ahead we (would) just sit and talk, one to one, so it's a group. Group discussion to me is the best... I think we need a few days without the children available (to) just sit down and talk about programs. (25P)

> "Evaluation tells us where we're going and what we need to do. I think it's very importnat. I feel that personally I would like to do a lot more of it ... But our problem here is (enough time for) meetings, and it does require meetings. I don't think that we evaluate enough. I think we need to have more self evaluation where we do something like the PQR .. once every six weeks is the way I would like to do it. But it seems like we have so many things going on at this school that require teachers to be in meeings... So it's very hard to get people together, even to get a committee together to work on some of these things. I think it needs a lot of improvement." (13SP2)

This thought, that much could be accomplished with the existing evaluation data if only there were time to sit down leisurely to study it and make plans, was voiced by many of the respondents in our sample. It was probably the most clearly defined encourager to emerge from the interviews.

In fact, belief in this proposition was strong enough that a few schools had attempted to institutionalize greater opportunities for reflection and reorganization. One school held an annual off-campus conference just before the start of the new school year. They selected a comfortable site (neutral turf, as it were) where the staff could get together without the regular pressures of school to review the accomplishments of the previous year including student test scores and discuss the educational activities for the year to come. Another school

set aside its last staff meeting for "reflection and projection" during which time the teachers could take a more open and creative look at the school program and the data available from the year just concluded.

Unfortunately, the two instances cited above appear to be exceptional. Not all schools are taking action to fill the need for systematic planning time. But given the existing limitations of budgets and calendars it is not as easy action to take. In fact, the off-campus conference cited above has been reduced from two days to one this year, and it will be held on campus as well. The school's current budget was just too limited to afford the expense of the previous arrangements.

If our respondents are to be believed, the implication for utilization is clear. More time needs to be provided for review of evaluation data and systematic planning based on this information. We make this recommendation with caution, for the data from our study also suggest that the mere existence of pupil free afternoons or other open blocks of time will not insure greater attention to evaluation. There are innumerable other demands competing for such free time. To increase utilization the time should be earmarked in some manner specifically for the purpose of analyzing and acting upon evaluation.

This suggestion is primarily an administrative question and not something that is within the direct control of the evaluator. However, a knowledgeable evaluator might make such

a suggestion to the decision makers with whom he or she is working. In fact, in some cases an evaluator can insist on a first hand presentation and discussion of the data as the chief reporting format. If enough emphasis is given to this demand, then time may be set aside for it.

Conclusion

Two of the general features that emerged from our data -- proximity and competing demands of time -- have been discussed and their action as constraints or encouragers to the utilization of evaluation has been analyzed.

Proximity was divided into structural and temporal components. The data suggests that information which is different in form and content from the school's instructional program (structural proximity) is less likely to be used in decision making. There are two aspects to temporal proximity. Evaluation is less likely to have impact if it comes at a time when decisions are no longer being made (timeliness) and if the information it contains is no longer current (active time frame) and thus less relevant to the decision.

The second general constraining feature that emerged from our data was competing demands on time. There currently are many demands on teacher and administrator time which tend to minimize the amount of attention that is paid to evaluation.

This analysis has definite implications for the evaluator or the school administrator who is interested in increasing the use of evaluation. When one considers the constraining or encouraging potential of the form and content of evaluation, the active time frame of the data, the timeliness of the reporting and the competing demands of school personnel's time, a number of suggestions for improvement can be made. To increase evaluation utilization at the site level the evaluation should be

planned so that:

1. The data are collected and reported in a form that is easy to use and corresponds to whatever organizational system is in use in the school.
2. The instruments reflect the same content and internal scope as the instructional program at the school.
3. The data collection and reporting process is coordinated with the school calendar and the important identifiable decision periods.
4. The data is analyzed and reported quickly.
5. Time is set aside for review of the information. In this regard, a first hand presentation with questions may be much better than a written report.

However, one small caveat is in order. The fact that each of these factors was clearly identifiable as a constraint based on our data does not necessarily mean that improvement in these areas will increase impact. If, for example, all evaluation were suddenly structurally and temporally proximate it might be that administrators would just point elsewhere to explain the continuing non-use of the data. One can never know with certainty the consequences of suggested changes in the way things are done. It is our firm belief, however, that the recommendations derived from this study will have positive impact on utilization.

As a final word, it should be mentioned that our analysis of the data is not complete. A number of psychosocial variables